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What is gothic style of architecture

The Gothic Revival style is part of the mid-19th century picturesque and romantic movement in architecture, reflecting the public's taste for buildings inspired by medieval design. This was a real departure from the previously popular styles that drew inspiration from the classical forms of ancient Greece and Rome. While distinctly different, both the Gothic Revival style and the Greek Revival style looked to the past, and both remained popular throughout the mid 19th century. The Gothic Revival style in America was advanced by architects Alexander Jackson Davis and especially Andrew Jackson Downing, authors of influential house plan books, Rural Residences (1837), Cottage Residences (1842), and The Architecture of Country Houses (1850). This style was promoted as an appropriate design for rural settings, with its complex and irregular shapes and forms fitting well into the natural landscape. Thus, the Gothic Revival style was often chosen for country homes and houses in rural or small town settings. The Gothic Revival style was also popular for churches, where high style elements such as castle-like towers, parapets, and tracery windows were common, as well as the pointed Gothic arched windows and entries. The Carpenter Gothic style is a distinctive variation of the Gothic Revival style featuring vertical board and batten wooden siding, pointed arches and incised wooden trim. The name comes from the extensive use of decorative wood elements on the exterior. While some examples remain, the pure Carpenter Gothic style is not well represented in Pennsylvania. The most commonly identifiable feature of the Gothic Revival style is the pointed arch, used for windows, doors, and decorative elements like porches, dormers, or roof gables. Other characteristic details include steeply pitched roofs and front facing gables with delicate wooden trim called vergeboards or bargeboards. This distinctive incised wooden trim is often referred to as "gingerbread" and is the feature most associated with this style. Gothic Revival style buildings often have porches with decorative turned posts or slender columns, with flattened arches or side brackets connecting the posts. Gothic Revival style churches may have not just pointed arch windows and porticos, but often feature a Norman castle-like tower with a crenellated parapet or a high spire. Many examples of Gothic Revival buildings of both high style and more vernacular character can be found across the state. The high style buildings, mansions, churches, prisons and schools sometimes offer ornate architectural details. The more common vernacular buildings may have only a few Gothic details, usually pointed arch windows and a front facing gable with wooden trim. Gothic Revival details may also be found in urban settings on rowhouses or duplexes. Later in the 19th century, Gothic Revival details were mixed with elements of other Victorian era styles to become a style known as the Victorian Gothic. In the early 20th century, a distinct variation of the Gothic Revival style, known as the Collegiate Gothic style, developed primarily for educational buildings. These derivative forms of the Gothic Revival style are more fully discussed elsewhere in this field guide. Common Building Types Identifiable Features Pointed arches as decorative element and as window shape Front facing gables with decorative incised trim (vergeboards or bargeboards) Porches with turned posts or columns Steeply pitched roof Gables often topped with finials or crossbracing Decorative crowns (gable or drip mold) over windows and doors Castle-like towers with parapets on some high style buildings Carpenter Gothic buildings have distinctive board and batten vertical siding Photos Click the thumbnails for larger images. Characteristics of Gothic Architecture Gothic art evolved out of Romanesque art and lasted from the mid-12th century up to the late 16th century in some areas of Germany. Architecture was the main art form of the Gothic, and the main structural characteristics of Gothic architectural design stemmed from the efforts of medieval masons to solve the problems associated with supporting heavy masonry ceiling vaults (arched roofs) over wide spans. The problem arose because the stonework of the traditional arched roof exerted a tremendous downward and outward pressure against the walls upon which it rested, which often caused a collapse. Up to and including the preceding period of Romanesque architecture (c.800-1150), building designers believed that vertical supporting walls had to be made extremely thick and heavy in order to counteract and absorb the vault's downward and outward pressure. But Gothic designers solved this problem around 1120 with several brilliant innovations. Ribbed Vaulting: Flying Buttresses: Pointed Arch First and most important, they developed a ribbed vault, made up of intersecting barrel vaults, whose stone ribs supported a vaulted ceiling of thin stone panels. Not only did this new arrangement significantly reduce the weight (and thus the outward thrust) of the ceiling vault, but also the vault's weight was now transmitted along a distinct stone rib, rather than along a continuous wall edge, and could be channelled from the rib to other supports, such as vertical piers or flying buttresses, which eliminated the need for solid, thick walls. Furthermore, Gothic architects replaced the round arches of the barrel vault with pointed arches which distributed the vault's weight in a more vertical direction. To put it simply, until Gothic builders revolutionized building design, the weight of the roof (vault) fell entirely on the supporting walls. As a result, the heavier the roof or the higher the roof, the more downward and outward pressure on the walls and the thicker they had to be to stay upright. A Romanesque cathedral, for instance, had massively thick continuous walls which took up huge amounts of space and created small, dim interiors. In contrast, Gothic architects channelled the weight of the roof along the ribs of the ceiling, across the walls to a flying buttress (a semi-arch), and then down vertical supports (piers) to the ground. In effect, the roof no longer depended on the walls for support. As a result the walls of a Gothic cathedral could be built a lot higher (which made the building even more awesome), they could be a lot thinner (which created more interior space); they could contain more windows (which led to brighter interiors and, where stained glass art was used, more Biblical art for the congregation). All this led to the emergence of a completely new type of cathedral interior, whose tall, thin walls gave the impression of soaring verticality, enhanced by multi-coloured light flooding through huge expanses of stained glass. Its exterior was more complex than before, with lines of vertical piers connected to the upper walls by flying buttresses, and large rose windows. As the style evolved, decorative art tended to supercede structural matters. Thus decorative stonework known as tracery was added, along with a rich assortment of other decorative features, including lofty porticos, pinnacles and spires. Master Masons Medieval masons were highly skilled craftsmen and their trade was most frequently used in the building of castles, churches and cathedrals. A Master Mason was someone who also had charge over carpenters, glaziers and other works (and work teams). Indeed, all skilled and unskilled workers on a building site were under the supervision of the Master Mason. He himself was based in what was known as the Mason's Lodge. All major building sites would have a Mason's Lodge, from which all the work on the site was organised. History and Development of Gothic Architecture Three phases of Gothic architectural design can be distinguished: Early, High, and Late Gothic. Early Gothic (1120-1200) The fusion of all the above mentioned structural elements into a coherent style of architecture occurred first in the Ile-de-France (the region around Paris), whose prosperous inhabitants had sufficient resources to build the great cathedrals that now epitomize Gothic architecture. The earliest surviving Gothic structure is the Abbey of Saint-Denis in Paris, begun in about 1140. Cathedrals with similar vaulting and windows soon appeared, beginning with Notre-Dame de Paris (c.1163-1345) and Laon Cathedral (c.1112-1215). A series of four distinct horizontal levels soon evolved: ground-level, then tribune gallery level, then triforium gallery level, above which was an upper, windowed level called a clerestory. The pattern of columns and arches used to support and frame these different elevations contributed to the geometry and harmony of the interior. Window tracery (decorative window dividers) also evolved, together with a diverse range of stained glass. The eastern end of the early Gothic cathedral consisted of a semicircular projection called an apse, which contained the high altar encircled by the ambulatory. The western end - the main entrance to the building - was much more visually impressive. Typically it had a wide frontage topped by two huge towers, whose vertical lines were counterbalanced by horizontal lines of monumental doorways (at ground level), above which were horizontal lines of windows, galleries, sculpture and other stonework. Typically, the long outside walls of the cathedral were supported by lines of vertical piers connected to the upper part of the wall in the form of a semi-arch known as a flying buttress. This early style of Gothic architectural design spread across Europe to Germany, England, the Low Countries, Italy, Spain and Portugal. For an interesting comparison with Eastern architecture, see: the 12th century Angkor Wat Khmer Temple (1115-45) and the 11th century Kandariya Mahadeva Temple (1017-29). High Gothic (1200-80) "Rayonnant" On the Continent, the next phase of Gothic building design is known as Rayonnant Gothic architecture, whose English equivalent is referred to as "Decorated Gothic". Rayonnant Gothic architecture was characterized by new arrays of geometrical decoration which grew increasingly elaborate over time, but hardly any structural improvements. In fact, during the Rayonnant phase, cathedral architects and masons shifted their attention away from the task of optimizing weight distribution and building higher walls, and concentrated instead on enhancing the 'look and feel' of the building. This approach led to the addition of many different decorative features including pinnacles (upright structures, typically spired, that topped piers, buttresses, or other exterior elements), moldings, and, notably, window tracery (such as mullions). The most characteristic feature of the Rayonnant Gothic is the huge circular rose window adorning the west facades of many churches, such as Strasbourg Cathedral (1015-1439). Other typical characteristics of Rayonnant architecture include the slimming-down of interior vertical supports and the merging of the triforium gallery with the clerestory, until walls are largely composed of stained glass with vertical bars of tracery dividing windows into sections. The foremost examples of the Rayonnant style include the cathedrals of Reims, Amiens, Bourges and Beauvais. Late Gothic (1280-1500) "Flamboyant" A third style of Gothic architectural design emerged around 1280. Known as Flamboyant Gothic architecture, it was even more decorative than Rayonnant, and continued until about 1500. Its equivalent in English Gothic architecture is the "Perpendicular style". The characteristic feature of Flamboyant Gothic architecture is the widespread use of a flame-like (French: flambe) S-shaped curve in stone window tracery. In addition, walls were transformed into one continuous expanse of glass, supported by skeletal uprights and tracery. Geometrical logic was frequently obscured by covering the exterior with tracery, which overlaid masonry as well as windows, augmented by complex clusters of gables, pinnacles, lofty porticos, and star patterns of extra ribs in the vaulting. The focus on image rather than structural substance may have been influenced by political events in France, after King Charles IV the Fair died in 1328 without leaving a male heir. This prompted claims from his nearest male relative, his nephew Edward III of England. When the succession went to Philip VI (1293-1350) of the French House of Valois, it triggered the start of the Hundred Years War (1337), which led to a reduction in religious architecture and an increase in the construction of military and civil buildings, both royal and public. As a result, Flamboyant Gothic designs are evident in many town halls, guild halls, and even domestic residences. Few churches or cathedrals were designed entirely in the Flamboyant style, some notable exceptions being Notre-Dame d'Epine near Chalons-sur-Marne and Saint-Maclou in Rouen. Other important examples include the north spire of Chartres and the Tour de Beurre at Rouen. In France, Flamboyant Gothic architecture eventually lost its way - becoming much too ornate and complicated - and was superseded by the classical forms of Renaissance architecture imported from Italy in the 16th century. Gothic Architectural Sculpture Gothic sculpture was inextricably linked to architecture - indeed it might even be called "architectural sculpture" - since the exterior of the typical Gothic cathedral was heavily decorated with column statues of saints and the Holy Family, as well as narrative relief sculpture illustrating a variety of Biblical themes. It was a huge source of income for sculptors throughout Europe, many of whom travelled from site to site. During the Early Gothic, statues and reliefs were little changed from Romanesque sculpture in their stiff, hieratic forms - witness the figures on the Royal Portal of Chartres Cathedral (1145-55). But during the 12th century and early 13th century, they became more true-to-life, as exemplified by the figures at Reims Cathedral (c.1240), who possess individual facial features and bodies, as well as natural poses and gestures. Sculpture assumed a more prominent role during the period 1250-1400, with numerous statues and other carvings appearing on the facades of cathedrals, typically in their own niches. Then, from around 1375 onwards, the courtly idiom known as International Gothic Art ushered in a new era of refinement and prettiness, which rapidly led to an over-the-top artificiality in all types of art including International Gothic illuminations and painting as well as sculpture. From about 1450, Gothic sculpture in France was increasingly influenced by Renaissance sculpture being developed in Italy, although traditional styles - notably in wood carving - persisted later in Germany and other areas of northern Europe. See also: English Gothic Sculpture (from roughly 1150 to 1250) and German Gothic Sculpture (from 1190 to 1280). Gothic Revival Movement (19th Century) After first reappearing in late-18th century architecture (in Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill home) Gothic designs experienced a major revival during the period of Victorian architecture (c.1840-1900), notably in England and America. Championed by the art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) and employed principally for its decorative and romantic features, Gothic Revivalism gave a significant impetus to Victorian art thanks to buildings like: the Houses of Parliament (completed 1870), designed by Charles Barry and August Pugin; and Fonthill Abbey, designed by James Wyatt. In the United States, the style is exemplified by New York's Trinity Church (1840), designed by Richard Upjohn (1802-78), and St Patrick's Cathedral (1859-79), designed by James Renwick (1818-95). For the influence of Gothic architecture on modern buildings in England and America, see: Architecture 19th Century. Articles on Medieval Art • Medieval Christian Art (600-1200) Illuminated texts, sculpture. • Medieval Sculpture (300-1000) From Late Antiquity to Romanesque. • Medieval Artists (1100-1400) From Gislebertus onwards. • Ottonian Art (900-1050) Architecture, ivory carvings, illuminations.

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